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ACTION AF-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AID-00 AMAD-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00
DS-00 UTED-00 VC-00 H-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 VCE-00
NSAE-00 NIMA-00 GIWI-00 SSO-00 SS-00 FMP-00 DSCC-00
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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2298
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
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UNCLAS GABORONE 001039

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: RULING PARTY STILL MIRED IN FACTIONAL FIGHTING

REFERENCE: (A) 04 GABORONE 1816 (B) 04 GABORONE 1873 (C)
GABORONE 667

11. (SBU) Summary: The ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) went to its bi-annual national congress internally divided and emerged from the event equally, if not further, mired in factional fights over personalities and positions of influence. Vice President Khama's supposedly neutral efforts to broker an agreement between two rival groups within the BDP, one of which he consistently favored, failed and left him deeply distrusted by the other camp. Daniel Kwelagobe, from the other camp, retained his seat as Secretary General, bringing a new lease on political life to

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organize his followers vis-a-vis the Nkate/Merafhe faction, which won every other elected seat to the Central Committee. While an outright split within the BDP seems unlikely before the 2009 election, continued fighting is likely to depress turnout of erstwhile BDP supporters, potentially helping the opposition to seize some marginal parliamentary seats. End Summary.

BDP DEEPLY DIVIDED

12. (U) The BDP went to its July 16-19 bi-annual congress divided along factional lines. One faction, led by Minister of Education Jacob Nkate and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mompoti Merafhe, enjoyed the semi-overt support of President Mogae and Vice President Khama. The other faction, led by party Secretary General Daniel Kwelagobe and MP Ponatshego Kedikilwe, boasted a larger popular following. Personality differences and ambitions for leadership positions, rather than political philosophy or policy priorities, defined the two groups. The factions had emerged publicly after Vice President Khama defeated Kedikilwe in an election for the Chairmanship of the party in 2003. At that congress, Kwelagobe was the only representative of his faction elected into the Central Committee. Following the October 2004 election, appointments to local councils and to the cabinet demonstrated a clear preference for members of the Nkate/Merafhe faction (Refs A and B). Perceiving a threat to their political futures, Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe loyalists desperately worked to mobilize sentiment against their rivals. The ensuing attacks and counter-attacks grew so impassioned that President Mogae declared a ban on BDP rallies a week before the Congress in a vain bid to preserve unity of spirit.

MOGAE: FACTIONALISM "MUST AND WILL STOP"

13. (U) In his remarks to the BDP congress, President Mogae asserted that, based on its past performance, his party would win the 2009 elections, provided it put an end to self-defeating schisms. He rejected as "laughable" the challenge posed by a potentially united opposition. Although he denied that party divisions were deep, he attributed the BDP's shrinking popular support to them and the struggles for leadership positions on which they are based. President Mogae declared that all campaigning for party offices must be "personal and discreet" and not make use of public media, thereby perpetuating internal rifts. He threatened with disciplinary action party members who violated these instructions or otherwise contributed to infighting.

KHAMA ALLIED WITH NKATE/MERAFHE FACTION

14. (U) Vice President Khama spent much of the past several

months trying to broker a compromise within the BDP. A congress of the BDP Women's Wing in May endorsed the notion by a narrow margin, suggesting that a possibility for an agreement between the two groups remained (Ref C). As the national congress approached, however, reports frequently surfaced that these talks had broken down. Finally, Khama admitted that his efforts had failed.

15. (U) Throughout the process of compromise talks, however, Khama was suspected of favoring the Nkate/Merafhe faction. The history of this group, having coalesced around Khama's candidacy for the party chairmanship in 2003, gave rise to such suspicions. His failure to reprimand Nkate/Merafhe followers who continuously said in the media that the compromise was a non-starter fed this perception. Khama's criticism of the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction for attacks on its rivals, but silence over similar statements of the other faction members, appeared to set his seal on the Nkate/Merafhe group.

16. (SBU) BDP members reported to our Political Assistant that during voting for party offices at the congress, Khama acted as a whip, text-messaging leaders of the Nkate/Merafhe

faction to ensure that their followers voted for the right person. He is also said to have discouraged Minister for Presidential Affairs and Public Administration Phandu Skelemani, who sympathizes with Nkate/Merafhe faction, from standing as an additional Central Committee member, fearing that his candidacy would split the vote and give the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction another seat.

KWELAGOBES SURVIVES, NKATE/MERAFHE DOMINATES

17. (U) Ironically, the outcome of the election for party offices matched one of the compromise scenarios proposed by Khama - Kwelagobe retained the seat of Secretary General as the lone representative of his faction elected to the Central Committee. The fact that this resulted from a hard fought contest - delegates told Political Assistant that they had lobbied and strategized all night on the eve of balloting - means that the trust and good will needed to heal the rift is more lacking than ever before. Controlling the majority of powerfully positions in the party, the Nkate/Merafhe faction likely will have little interest in a compromise. Having fought for and won the Secretary General's seat, Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe loyalists have renewed self-confidence and another two years at the helm of party operations to mobilize their supporters.

18. (U) In a move seen by many as Mogae's initiative to end rivalry between the factions within the BDP, he named two members of the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction as additional members to the party's Central Committee. Three representatives of the Nkate/Merafhe camp completed the five nominated seats. The appointment of former BDP Chairman Ponatshego Kedikilwe and former Deputy Treasurer Paul Paledi departed from the 2003 experience when, after the Ghanzi congress, Mogae drew additional members only from the Nkate/Merafhe faction that had rallied around Vice President Khama. This gesture alone will not reconcile the rivals, however. Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe loyalists have made it clear that they hope for a cabinet shuffle that will usher more of their allies into ministerial positions. So far, such a concession by the President seems unlikely.

KHAMA A DIVISIVE FIGURE

19. (SBU) The Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe camp now thoroughly distrusts the Vice President but cannot acknowledge this fact publicly. In a private conversation with Political Assistant, former Executive Secretary of BDP and Member of Parliament Botsalo Ntuane said that as BDP Chairman, Vice President Khama is failing to manage the party well. He said Khama believes in "exclusive" policies, meaning a less than consultative approach to governance, which, he said, the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction will resist. In another private conversation, when asked who Khama's advisers were, MP Ponatshego Kedikilwe observed that Khama was not one to accept advice readily. Although he was reluctant to talk about Khama, Kedikilwe said he "fears for the future." Not surprisingly, these comments echo remarks from other BDP members associated with the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction, such as former president of the BDP youth wing Gomolemo Motswaledi, that Khama is regarded as authoritarian and intolerant of views that differ with his own. Significantly, however, such fears have been articulated even by some of the Vice President's allies (Ref C).

COMMENT

10. (SBU) President Mogae's confident rhetoric to the contrary, Botswana's ruling party has emerged from its biannual congress just as -- if not more -- divided than it was before. These divisions are unlikely to result in a formal splintering of the party. Although one camp deeply

distrusts the Vice President, such misgivings are evident in the other faction as well. No member of the BDP will articulate these facts due to the popular reverence for Khama as a chief, not just of the Bamangwato but of the entire nation. Furthermore, the prospects of winning positions of influence as a member of a new party or opposition party remain quite slim. Until that scenario changes, the prospects for an outright split in the BDP are small. In a more likely scenario, bickering within the party will dismay its former supporters, reducing turn out of BDP adherents on election day 2009, which could enable the opposition to seize several marginal seats in parliament.

HUGGINS

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